

RCR Topic: Authorship and Mentor/Trainee Relationships

Title: Grow Up! Keep Your Promise!

Case: Dr. Angel is a postdoctoral fellow in the laboratory of Dr. Zanders. Dr. Angel has just landed a job at a different institution, and received excellent support from Dr. Zanders and his laboratory during the application process. This extended to practicing interview seminars, discussing career plans, letters of recommendation, and so forth.

Dr. Angel made a promise to Dr. Zander that the two papers she had not finished would be completed by the time she left for her new position. This goal was not met, and Dr. Angel left for her new job. She and Dr. Zander agreed that starting a new job is a scary thing and unexpected things always happen. They set a new deadline, three months down the road, for these papers to be completed. This deadline was missed with no explanation. Dr. Zander communicated to Dr. Angel that this was not acceptable, and gave her one more month to complete the papers. Dr. Angel did not respond to Dr. Zander's communications and this deadline, too, was missed.

Dr. Zander informed Dr. Angel that he would take back the papers and complete them himself. Because of this work, Dr. Zander would not place Dr. Angel as first author of these studies.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why might Dr. Angel not have finished these papers?
2. Is it fair of Dr. Zander to not give Dr. Angel first author credit? Who should decide the order of authors, and what factors should be considered in that decision?
3. What do you believe are the primary objectives of being a postdoctoral fellow? Does your mentor agree?
4. How could this problem have been prevented?